

Gendered Person References in German and Chinese News Reporting: A Comparative Study

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Gendered language shapes societal perceptions of identity and influences how audiences mentally represent their identities (Braun et al. 2007; Gyax et al. 2008; Stahlberg & Sczesny 2011). While gender-inclusive language has been widely discussed for languages with grammatical gender, there is little information on languages like Mandarin Chinese, which do not have any grammatical gender (Hellinger & Bußmann 2002, 2003). This study works on the differences between systems by comparing gendered person references in German and Chinese online news articles and examining how translation can affect the gender representation in these languages.

In German, explicit gender markings are required in gendered nouns, such as *der Lehrer* ('male teacher') or *die Lehrerin* ('female teacher') (Braun et al. 1998). In contrast, the equivalent term in Chinese 教师 ('teacher') is non-gender marked and therefore inherently gender-neutral. If gender needs to be marked, it appears through additional modifiers (男教师 'male teacher', 女教师 'female teacher'), or person deixis in written contexts (Packard 2000). The gender information in Chinese is only encoded on the semantic level.

These structural differences pose challenges for translation, as they can impact the meaning and tone of the original text. In translations between Chinese and German, non-gender marking may become explicitly gendered and conversely, gendered person references may lose their gender distinction. We suggest that these shifts can influence how readers understand the translated texts in cross-language communication.

This study is based on a self-compiled corpus of the online news from *People's Daily* in its German and Chinese edition (Sept. 2023 – Sept. 2024), currently focusing on articles from the first four months. It examines how non-gender marked nouns in Chinese news articles are translated in German, and how this affects gender representation.

Initial findings indicate that gender-neutral person references in Chinese are frequently translated into German with the generic masculine form, which may blur the interpretation of the subjects' actual gender. In some cases, German translations also show a tendency to use more concrete formulations, employing person references even to denote collective or institutional actors, whereas the Chinese original texts prefer abstract or impersonal expressions (e.g. translating the term 邮政行业 'postal branch' into *Paketzusteller* 'parcel delivery men (i.e. 'parcel delivery company)'). This preference also increases the use of explicitly gendered person nouns in German translations.

Notably, the German translations come from the official German version of the *People's Daily*, but not from native production. They may not fully reflect current trends in gender-inclusive language in German-speaking media but offer an insight into institutional practices from a German-as-a-foreign-language (DaF) perspective. Future work may include bidirectional translation if there are convincing sources.

Even so, the conclusions still highlight the role of translation as an active process that can reinforce or challenge gender representations across linguistic and cultural contexts. Understanding these dynamics in language transfer is important for promoting gender-sensitive translation practices and raising awareness of linguistic biases.

References

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